

Go Home, Occupy Movement!!

(The *McFB* – Was Ist Das?)

Ever since, years ago, I coined the expression “McFB way of life” and particularly since my intriguing FB articles (*Is there life after Facebook I and II*) have been published, I was confronted with numerous requests to clarify the meaning. My usual answer was a contra-question: If humans hardly ever question fetishisation or oppose the (self-) trivialization, why then is the subsequent brutalization a surprise to them?

Not pretending to reveal a coherent theory, the following lines are my instructive findings, most of all on the issue why it is time to go home and search for a silence.

Largely drawing on the works of the grand philosophers of the German Classicism and Dialectic Materialism, it was sociologist Max Weber who was the first – among modern age thinkers – to note that the industrialized world is undergoing a rapid process of rationalization of its state (and other vital societal) institutions. This process – Weber points out – is characterized by an increased efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control over any ‘threat’ of uncertainty. Hereby, the uncertainty should be understood in relation to the historically unstable precognitive and cognitive human, individual and group, dynamics. A disheartened, cold and calculative over-rationalization might lead to obscurity of irrationality, Weber warns. His famous metaphor of the *iron cage* or *irrationality of rationality* refers to his concern that extremely rationalized (public) institution inevitably alienates itself and turns dehumanized to both those who staff them and those they serve, with a tiny upper caste of controllers steadily losing touch of reality.

Revisiting, rethinking and rejuvenating Weber’s theory (but also those of Sartre, Heidegger, Lukács, Lefebvre, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Bloch), it was the US sociologist George Ritzer who postulated that the late 20th century institutions are rationalized to a degree that the entire state becomes ‘McDonaldized’, since the principles of the fast food industry have gradually pervaded other segments of society and very aspects of life (*The McDonaldization of Society*, a controversial and highly inspiring book of popular language, written in 1993).

Thus paraphrased, Ritzer states that (i) *McEfficiency* is achieved by the systematic elimination of unnecessary time or effort in pursuing an objective. As the economy has to be just-in-time competitively productive, society has to be efficient as well. Corresponding to this mantra, only a society governed by business models and sociability run on marketing principles is a successfully optimized polity. Premium efficiency in the workplace (and over broader aspects of sociableness) is attainable by introducing F.W. Taylor’s and H. Ford’s assembly line into human resources and their intellectual activity (sort of intellectual assembly line)¹. Therefore, *McEfficiency* solidifies the system, protecting its karma and dharma from any spontaneity, digression, unnecessary questioning and experimenting or surprise.

(ii) *McCalculability* is an attempt to measure quality in terms of quantity, whereby quality becomes secondary, if at all a concern. The IT sector, along with the search engines and cyber-social clubs, has considerably contributed to the growing emphasis on calculability. Not only the fast food chains (1 billion meals, everybody-served-in-a-minute), Google, Facebook, TV Reality Shows, and the like, as well as the universities, hospitals and travel agencies, all operate on a nearly fetishised and worshiped ‘most voted’, ‘frequently visited’, ‘most popular’,

¹ University professors have been confronted lately with lengthy and tedious semestral reports in which the central part constitutes the question “teacher input – teacher output”; as if they are not dealing with humans in tertiary education but manufacturing auto spare parts. Following the so-called business models of the corporate world, the latest trend in most of the UN Specialized Agencies is to visibly claim “staff rotation” (as if it were crop, not people), as well as to note on job applications, almost a warning; “we are not a career organization” – as if the CTBTO, WMO and other IOs are hobby rooms or volunteer fire-brigades, not serious entities dependent on specialists of high professional integrity and profound profile.

a *big is beautiful*, matrix. It is a calculability which mystically assures us that the *BigMac* is always the best meal – given its quantity; that the best reader is always a bestseller book; and that the best song is a tune with the most clicks on *YouTube*. One of the most wanted air carriers, AirAsia has a slogan: *Everyone can fly now*. Amount, size, frequency, length and volume is all what matters. Thus, a number, a pure digit becomes the (*Burger*) king. Long *Yahoo*, the king! Many of my students admit to me that for them the Google is more than a search engine; that actually *googalization* is a well-established method which considerably and frequently replaces the cognitive selection when preparing assignments and exams. Ergo, instead of complimenting, it increasingly substitutes the process of human reasoning.

(iii) *McPredictability* is the key factor of the rationalized McDonalds process. On the larger scale, a rational (rationally optimized) society is one in which people know well beforehand what (and when) to expect. Hence, fast food is always mediocre – it never tastes very bad or very good. The parameter of McFood is therefore a surprise-less world in which equally both disappointment and delight are considerably absent. McMeals will always blend uniform preparation and contents as well as the standardized serving staff outfit and their customized approach. In the end, it is not about food at all. What makes McDonalds so popular is a size, numbers and predictability. (All three are proportionately and causally optimized, and objectivized: a meal, who serves it and those served – until the locality and substance of each of the three becomes fluid, obsolete and irrelevant). In such an atmosphere of predictability, the culture of tacit obedience (ignorance of self-irrelevance through the corrosive addiction) is to bread, even unspotted. Consequently, more similarities than differences is the central to a question of predictability, on both ends: demand (expectation, possibility) and supply (probability).

(iv) *McControl* represents the fourth and final Weberian aspect for Ritzer. Traditionally (ever since the age of cognitvity²), humans are the most unpredictable element, a variable for the rationalized, bureaucratic systems, so it is an imperative for the McOrganization to (pacify through) control. Nowadays, technology offers a variety of palliatives and tools for the effective control of both employers (supply, probability) and customers (demand, possibility), as well as to control the controllers. A self-articulation, indigenous opinionation, spontaneous initiative and unconstrained action is rather simulated, yet stimulated very seldom. Only once the wide spectrum of possibilities is quietly narrowed down, a limited field of probabilities will appear so large. To this end, the IT appliances are very convenient (cheap, discreet and invisible, but omnipresent and highly accurate) as they compute, pre-decide, channel and filter moves, as well as they store and analyze behavior patterns with their heartless algorithms.

Aided by the instruments of efficiency, calculability and predictability, the control eliminates (the premium or at least minimizes any serious impact of) authenticity, autonomous thinking and independent judgment. Depth and frequency of critical insights and of unpredictable human actions driven by unexpected conclusions is rationalized to a beforehand calculable, and therefore tolerable few. Hyper-rationalized, exercised, ultra-efficient, predictable and controlled environment subscribes also a full coherence to the asymmetrically social and dysfunctional-emphatic atmosphere of disaffected but ultimate obedience (‘guided without force’, ‘prompted without aim’, ‘useful idiots’, ‘fitting the social machine without friction’).

Ergo, the final *McSociety* product is a highly efficient, predictable, computed, standardized, typified, instant, unison, imitative and controlled environment which is – paradoxically enough – mystified through the worshiping glorification (of scale). Subjects of such a society

² Every system of any living organism on this planet survives by functioning through mechanical solidarity, a non-cognitive group cohesion. Early humanoids were not an exception to this rule. For 1,9 out of 2 million years of our history, the custom of pre-civilizational *homo sapiens* (which represents the first societal normative order) was an act of control allied with brutal coercion of a herd/gang onto the diverting, non complying individual – mechanical solidarity aimed at group’s security to satisfy the basic need – survival.

are fetishising the system and trivializing their own contents – smooth and nearly unnoticed trade-off. When aided by the IT in mass, frequent and severe use within the scenery of huge shopping malls (enveloped by a consumerist fever & mixed with cyber-neurosis, disillusional and psychosomatic disorders), it is an environment which I coined as the *McFB way of life*.

This is a *cyber-iron cage* habitat: a shiny but instrumented, cold and brutal place; incapable of vision, empathy, initiative and action. If and while so, is there any difference between Gulag and *Goo(g)lag* – as both being prisons of free mind? Contrary to the established rhetoric, courage, solidarity, vision and initiative were far more monitored, restricted, stigmatized and prosecuted than enhanced, supported and promoted throughout the human history—as they’ve been traditionally perceived like a threat to the inaugurated order, a challenge to the functioning status quo, defiant to the dogmatic conscripts of admitted, permissible, advertized, routinized, recognized and prescribed social conduct.³

Elaborating on a well-known argument of ‘defensive modernization’ of Fukuyama, it is to state that throughout the entire human history a technological drive was aimed to satisfy the security (and control) objective; and it was rarely (if at all) driven by a desire to (enlarge the variable and to) ease human existence or to enhance human emancipation and liberation of societies at large. Thus, unless operationalized by the system, both intellectualism and technological breakthroughs were traditionally felt and perceived as a threat.

Consequently, all cyber-social Networks and related search engines are far away from what they are portrayed to be: a decentralized but unified intelligence. In fact, they primarily serve the efficiency, predictability, calculability and control purpose, and only then they serve everything else – as to be e.g. user-friendly and *en mass* service attractive. To observe the new dynamics of social phenomenology between manipulative fetishisation (probability) and self-trivialization (possibility), the Cyber-social Platforms –these dustbins of human empathy– are particularly interesting.

Facebook itself is a perfect example of how to utilize (to simulate, instead of to stimulate and empathically live) human contents. Its toolkit offers efficient, rationalized, predictable clean, and transparent, and most intriguing of all, very user-friendly convenient reduction of all possible relations between two individuals: ‘friend’, ‘no-friend’. It sets a universal language, so standardized and uncomplicated that even any machine can understand it – a binary code: ‘1’ (friend) ‘0’ (no-friend)⁴, or eventually ‘1’ (brother/sister), ‘1/0’ (friend), ‘0’ no-friend – just two digits to feed precise algorithmic calculations. Remember, number is the king. *Gott ist tot*, dear Nietzsche – so are men.

Be it occupied or besieged, McDonalds will keep up its menu. Instead, we should finally occupy ourselves (e.g. by reducing enormous noise pollution in and all around us).⁵

It is a high time to replace the dis-conceptual flux on streets for a silent reflection at home. Sorry Garcin, hell is not other people. Hell are we!!

³ Aegean theater of the Antique Greece was the place of astonishing revelations and intellectual excellence – a remarkable density and proximity, not surpassed up to our age. All we know about science, philosophy, sports, arts, culture and entertainment, stars and earth has been postulated, explored and examined then and there. Simply, it was a time and place of triumph of human consciousness, pure reasoning and sparkling thought. However, neither Euclid, Anaximander, Heraclites, Hippocrates (both of Chios, and of Cos), Socrates, Archimedes, Ptolemy, Democritus, Plato, Pythagoras, Diogenes, Aristotle, Empedocles, Conon, Eratosthenes nor any of dozens of other brilliant ancient Greek minds did ever refer by a single sentence, by a single word to something which was their everyday life, something they saw literally on every corner along their entire lives. It was an immoral, unjust, notoriously brutal and oppressive slavery system that powered the Antique state. This myopia, this absence of critical reference on the obvious and omnipresent is a historic message – highly disturbing, self-telling and quite a warning.

⁴ One recent foreign policy doctrine was the *McFB*-ised look-alike: “you are either with us (‘1’) or against us (‘0’).

⁵ By exporting the revolts all over the place, Al-Qaida treats a state – identical to the early Bolsheviks – as a revolutionary cause, not as a geopolitical, socio-cultural and geo-economic reality. The Al-Qaida is doing it while its leadership and *Sturm Falanges* are headquartered in the Stone Age- like scenery of Afghan caves, as the early Bolsheviks were doing it from a feudal-frozen country saturated by cataclysmic hungers. Let’s hope that OWS will not follow the same ‘revolt exporting’ logics. The FB’s *fleshmobs* hold an international reach, but the political agendas are always and only national.

Post Scriptum:

In his emotionally charged speech of December 2011, President Obama openly warned the US citizens: “Inequality distorts our democracy. It gives an outsized voice to the few who can afford high-priced lobbyists (...) the wealthiest Americans are paying the lowest taxes in over half a century (...) Some billionaires have a tax rate as low as 1%. One per cent! (...) The free market has never been a free license to take whatever you want from whoever you can...” (The White House Press Release, the Oswatomie High School, Kansas, 06 December 2011).

Two months before that speech, the highly respected, politically balanced and bipartisan Budget Office of the US Congress (CBO) released its own study “Trends in the Distribution of Household Income between 1979 and 2007” (October 2011). The CBO finds that, between 1979 and 2007, income grew by: 275% for the top 1% of the US households, 65% increase for the next 19% of households, less than a 40% increase for the following segment of households of the next 60%, and finally only an 18% income increase for the bottom of 20% of the US households. If we consider an inflation for the examined period of nearly 30 years, then the nominal growth would turn to a negative increase in real incomes for almost 80% of the US households; a single digit real income increase for the upper 19% of households; and still a three-digit income growth for the top 1% of population.

According to the available internet search engine counters, this CBO study has been retrieved 74,000 times since posted some 3 months ago. For the sake of comparison, an average clip of great-granddaughter of ultra-rich billionaire Conrad Hilton is clicked on *YouTube* over 31 million times. Roughly 3 million Americans would represent the top 1% of its population. Who are other 99% – pardon, 28 million individuals – interested in trivial clip/s (with obscure but explicit lines: *They can't do this to me, I'm rich*) of Miss Paris?

Remember what I asked at the beginning of this article: If humans hardly ever question fetishisation or oppose the (self-) trivialization, why then is the subsequent brutalization a surprise to them?

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* **This is the FB3 article (Is there life after Facebook? III – the Cyber Goo(g)lag Revelations)**

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